They'd Start To Think Of You As A Biter

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They'd Start To Think Of You As A Biter

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Summary

Raylan Givens is a US Marshal, but he hasn't always been.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Raylan has never been able to shed his hometown. Never been able to overlook the shape of his mother's eyes in his face, or forget the feel of his father's fists. It was inevitable, really, that he would end up back in Kentucky. Harlan's written on his skin, settled in his voice.

Raylan has been many things, but never a coward. He walks into the courthouse in Lexington with his hat on and his collar up and looks each and every one of them in the eye. There's a lull in conversation, chatter resuming behind him. He's used to it.

Art fixes him with a level stare. "Bit of a comedown from the Miami office."

Raylan shakes his hand. "Not with you here."

"Good to see ya."

Wish I could say the same, he doesn't say.

--

Of course his first case is Boyd Crowder. Of course. Raylan knows Boyd. Oh, he knows Boyd.

Raylan's daddy had sent him down a mine too young. Boyd's had sent him down too bitter. Sixteen and looking younger, they'd been birds of a dirty feather. Boyd had been magnetic, something hot and dangerous in his eyes, words hot and dangerous in his mouth.

Boyd may have been the powder man, but Raylan had also liked to play with fire.

--

Hell if Harlan hasn't changed.

Ava's shot Boyd's brother. She's completely unrepentant and Raylan loves her for it. She's a local girl through and through. It's like looking at the past, her blonde hair in the same style, her smile wary. Her eyes have always looked old in her face.

"I had a crush on you from the time I was twelve years old." Ava says, kissing him softly. He opens his lips to her, automatic. He keeps his eyes open.

"Heard you got sold off," she whispers.

"You heard right."

"That's a damn shame." She invites him in, gives him a glass and a smile. "You been to visit your Daddy yet?"

--

Boyd embraces him like a brother. Raylan doesn't let himself press into him in return. It's been far too many years to feel this raw. He follows Boyd inside, struck with deja-vu.

"You been gone too long," Boyd says fondly, watching him choke on moonshine. "You seen your daddy yet?" Raylan stares him down. It's not an answer, except that it is.

"I know you, Deputy Marshal Raylan Givens," Boyd says, quiet. Boyd asks if he saw his father's face when he killed a man in Florida. He certainly knew him, once.

"You make me pull, I'll put you down," he says instead of 'always', and he's gone.

--

Even after all these years, he should've know better than to trust a Crowder. Ava's gotten herself involved with them for better or worse, and being held hostage by her brother in law isn't the worst they could do to her. Still. He's mad as hell.

Boyd sends Ava to the kitchen, and Raylan bristles. He'd told Boyd the naked truth, that if he drew, he wouldn't hesitate.

Shooting him in the chest doesn't feel like it ought to. It feels like betrayal.

--

Lexington's not like Harlan but it's still Kentucky, and people still talk.

Gutterson steps lightly around him, his evidently sarcastic demeanor tempered when Raylan's in the room. He can't stand it.

"What's your problem with me?" he finally snaps out, dropping into the chair next to his desk. He tries to keep it polite, body language unthreatening.

"Don't have one," says Tim, eyes flicking away.

"Let's talk it out Deputy, or else it's gonna be a picnic sharing this side of the room." He crosses his ankle over his knee and waits. Tim looks him up and down, and Raylan thinks he spots the issue.

"Imagination runnin' away with you, huh?" he smirks a little, for effect. Gutterson goes red to the tips of his ears. "So, what are we going to do about it?" he asks, watching his face.

"That's up to you." Tim says, swallowing.

Raylan levels a long look at him, holding his eyes.

"Yes, it is," he says. He watches his face, waiting for a sign.

“My apologies,” says Gutterson at last. To his credit, he doesn’t flinch.

“Just the way of the world,” he replies, getting up. “So?”

“There’s no problem on my end,” Gutterson clarifies. Raylan sticks out a hand and he takes it, grip strong and dry. Good to know, he thinks to himself.

--

“He lets you be a cowboy because he feels guilty,” Rachel says to him once, in the middle of the night on a long stakeout.

“Come again?” He’s only half awake, hat tipped over his eyes.

“He feels guilty. About you having to be back here.” She glances at his neck and he fights the urge to pull up his collar. It’s too dark for her to see anything.

“It’s not his guilt.” He takes a sip of his coffee and holds her gaze. “Go ahead and ask.”

She falls silent and he can almost hear her organizing her thoughts. She’s a good Marshal, tough, methodical.

“Why’d he do it? Boy like you, old enough to be fractious? It makes no sense.”

“I don’t think violent drunks are renowned for their rational decisions.” He chuckles wryly. “And I was real pretty, once upon a time.”

Rachel stares at him, eyes wide in the gloom.

“I’d started talking back, been down the mines a while and thought I was a man,” he breaks off, pinches the bridge of his nose. “Arlo thought to teach me a lesson and be rid of a problem all together.”

Better to get it out in the open.

“So how long were you...”

“Eight years, give or take.” He grimaces, rubbing the back of his neck before catching himself.

“You got out,” she says, more to herself then to him.

“I got out,” he echoes.

--

Not even two months on the job, he takes a bullet to the vest. Through a door, no less. He’s getting rusty. The impact knocks the breath from him like a battering ram and he goes down

hard, black haze creeping into his eyes.

His second shooting in Kentucky is decidedly more fatal than the first. Acting on nothing more than instinct and desperation, he takes the suspect down. He watches his blood pool on the floor and feels bones grate in his own chest. He drops his head down, breathing.

In. Out. He loses track of time.

Art drops down next to him on the couch at the scene, face grey. The paramedic has given him the all clear, so he doesn't ask if Raylan's okay.

"You're going on vacation," he says. "It'll be restful."

"I'm fine," Raylan rasps out.

"Restful for me," says Art, dropping a hand onto his shoulder and squeezing.

--

"I swore I'd never come back here," he tells her, bruise spread like a stain across his sternum.

"I know," says Ava, reaching for him.

He lets his forehead drop onto her shoulder, hours of driving settling into his bones, last adrenaline seeping away. He shudders out a sigh, closing his eyes.

Ava takes him inside.

She doesn't ask questions, just traces his scars lightly, silent, and folds him into her bed. Ava's got scars of her own, albeit of a different kind.

--

If he were more inclined to see God's hand in things, Raylan would have to laugh.

Winona's back in Lexington.

Agreeing to marry him had been the worst mistake of her life, he knows, but he can't stop the pang he feels when he sees her, or the jealousy coiled in the pit of his stomach.

She looks scared. His gut turns in sick satisfaction. Winona Hawkins. The name suits her.

We said we'd never come back to Kentucky, didn't we?

He wishes her well in her new life, old arguments ringing in his ears.

--

The bar's dark, dirty and out of the way, not at all a place he would have picked as Rachel's regular, but the bartender smiles at her and slides a vodka tonic across the counter without being asked. She smirks at Raylan like she knows she's taken him by surprise.

He orders bourbon on the rocks and Tim takes his with a twist.

"Wrecking good liquor, Gutterson," he says, perching on the stool next to him.

"Speak for yourself, Givens. The local swill leaves much to be desired."

Raylan smiles into his glass despite himself.

Tim scans the room, but appears to find it lacking.

"Give it time," says Raylan.

"You offering to be my wingman, cowboy?" Tim asks. Rachel laughs out loud and Tim tries to look affronted.

"Well boys, I'm leaving you to it," Rachel says, settling up with the bartender. They chorus their goodbyes, watching her walk out the door. He finishes his drink slowly, letting Tim down another. He wouldn't put money on him not being able to drive, but it's a near thing.

"You got plans later?" asks Gutterson at last.

"No," he says, waiting. The liquid courage seems to have done the job, because Tim leans in closer.

"So give me a ride home."

--

He doesn't bother to get well acquainted with Tim's place. He looks it over, gleans what information he can, and turns his focus back to Tim. He's sure he won't be coming back here.

The drive over spent up all the courage provided by Tim's buzz. He looks shy when Raylan begins to pull off his shirt, hesitating before doing the same.

Tim's eyes skip over the scars, settle on his face and hands.

When Raylan gets close, he hears Tim take in a fortifying breath. When he touches his cock, Raylan does it with a smile. That's all he needs.

Tim kisses Raylan like a teenager, too worried about what he's supposed to do. Maybe he's trying to impress. Raylan drags his lips from Tim's, purses them right next to his ear.

"You wanna take it, don't you?" he asks, like he can't wait.

Tim groans low in his throat when he nods, eyes closed. He's hard in Raylan's hand, desire disguised as curiosity.

It takes no time at all to pull the boy apart.

--
Raylan must be losing his touch, because he wakes Tim when he slips out of bed. Gutterson snaps awake in an instant, pushing himself up on his elbows. *Shit.*

"Got somewhere to be?" he asks, hoarse.

"Why?" Raylan replies, buckling his jeans.

"There's a diner down the way, opens early," Tim says, sitting up with a stretch. "Wouldn't have figured you for a morning person."

"I'm not," he mutters, looking around for his shirt.

Tim watches him, face unreadable in the morning gloom.

"It's your turn to get coffee on Monday," he says, rolling into his pillow.

--

He goes to visit Boyd again, remembers him laid out with a hole in his chest and morphine in his veins, too fever-high to give Raylan any satisfaction. Boyd looks thin and drawn, altogether leaner and more tightly wound than he'd been before.

"That military citizenship was a pretty good idea Boyd, else you'd be in a whole different set of chains," he says.

"I s'pose you'd know, Raylan," he drawls into the prison phone. "This is a surprise."

Raylan's sure that it isn't. Boyd's smile widens, all teeth and violence. Raylan wonders why he missed his heart. It may not have been his best decision, but he can't bring himself to regret it.

"I hear you're preaching the word," he says. Boyd stares at him unblinking, tells him about the souls he's saved, and Raylan listens.

"Gonna try and save me too, holy-man?" he asks, wry.

"I believe that it has already happened the other way 'round," Boyd tells him, deadly serious in the way only Boyd can be, quiet and intense.

Raylan considers his words carefully. "If shooting you was all it took to show you the light you'd be a saint by now."

Boyd blinks slowly, leans forward. His left hand is up against the glass in a flash, rough palm facing him like a benediction. Raylan doesn't put his up to match it, makes a fist under the table.

"It don't matter that you can't see it, Raylan. It's my soul, not yours."

"Goodbye, Boyd. Have fun with your sinners," he says, getting up.

"How's Ava?" Boyd asks suddenly. Raylan holds his gaze steady, halfway out of the chair, not sure what he's looking for.

"I reckon she's about the same. She ain't been to visit?"

"There's been bad blood between us in the past." Boyd puts his grin away, eyes bright in his sunken face. "She and I, we have amends to make." Raylan levels a considering look through the glass. Nothing Boyd says ever has just one shade of meaning.

"You're not as subtle as you think you are," he says, hanging up.

--

The call he's been dreading comes when he and Ava are in bed.

Ava passes him the phone, lays back down on top of him, soft breasts and fingers pressing into his ribs. He sinks his hands deep in her hair, stroking.

"That was my aunt Helen," he says to the ceiling. Ava rests her fingertips in the hollow at the base of his neck, rests her head on his chest.

She hums gently. "Arlo?"

"Yes." Raylan sighs, closes his eyes.

--

"You came to town, didn't so much as call," Helen accuses him in the diner, eyes narrowed.

"I had to work," he lies.

Helen's not his protector anymore, but he still owes her a debt. She chose Arlo, for better or worse, but he'll do right by her. She deserves that, if nothing else.

Helen searches his face in that particular way of hers, assessing and shrewd.

"I need you to bail Arlo out of jail," she says. He laughs in her face, incredulous and utterly unsurprised.

“No.” Raylan sits back, tilts his chin up. Her eyes dart to the faded white band he hasn’t bothered to hide. “He’s made his bed, and it’s got prison corners.”

“He’s your father, boy. Ain’t nothing gonna change that as long as you live.” Helen lights another cigarette, blowing the smoke his way.

Isn’t that the truth, he thinks. He looks at Helen, older and grayer and angrier and sees the toll of life in her face as surely as it sits on his. He loved her, once.

He bails his father out.

--

Arlo looks him up and down, grins wide and slow, hard eyes gleeful.

“I like the hat,” are Arlo’s first words to him in more than a decade.

Face to face with his father, Raylan stares him down, shows him his teeth. Arlo straightens up to look him in the eye and Raylan fights the urge to hammer him to the ground until there’s no fight left in him.

“Tell me,” he forces out. “Did I at least keep you above water long enough to pay off the medical?”

“Barely,” Arlo says bitterly. “Enough to keep the house. Shoulda held out for more!”

Raylan should have known better than to hope for closure here. He grabs Arlo by the arm and turns out towards the car.

“Let go of me, boy,” Arlo growls, trying to pull himself out of Raylan’s grip. Raylan clenches his fingers tighter, enjoying the yelp it gets out of his father, enjoying the realisation that Arlo can’t break away from him, even if he wants to.

Arlo’s gotten old.

--

Art finds out he’s been sleeping with Ava in the worst way possible, coming to the door easy as you please, two cups of coffee in hand.

He stares at Raylan’s bare chest, eyes raking over him, stares past his shoulder at the head of blonde hair in his bed. He scrubs a hand over his eyes.

“I’ll be in the car,” he says curtly, turning on his heel.

Raylan slides in beside him five minutes later, shirt buttoned all the way up.

“We’re gonna have to let Crowder go,” Art tells him, disappointment evident on his face, deep in his voice. He heaves a deep sigh. “Jesus, Raylan.”

He doesn’t say it, but he knows what Art is thinking. *Can’t get away from that kind of training. Can’t keep it in your fucking pants.*

Raylan has nothing to say, so he doesn’t. Art hands him the second cup.

He’ll be paying Boyd a visit when he gets out, if only to tell him that he’s never saved any souls and doesn’t plan on starting now.

--

He hears them before he sees them, two sets of footsteps moving towards the office.

“I’ve got no complaints with his performance,” Art says firmly, words echoing in the hall.

“I understand that,” says a mild voice, “But a Marshal shoots three people in the space of a few months? I have to look into it.”

Art and a smaller, darker man round the corner into the office proper, and Art looks taken aback to see him at his desk.

“You’re here early,” he says.

“Getting a head start” he replies, making a show of opening another case file.

“If you say so. Raylan, this is David Vasquez. He’s here to interrogate you.” Art crosses his arms, confrontational.

“Interview,” corrects Vasquez, reaching out a hand. “Internal Affairs has a few questions.”

Art shoots a look at him, shaking his head ever so slightly. Raylan lets go of Vasquez, leans back in his chair.

“No time like the present,” he says, waiting.

“Excellent.” The investigator smiles brightly. “Can we use your office?” he directs at Art, who shrugs genially.

“Why not?”

--

“I should put a sanction on you,” Vasquez says without preamble. He doesn’t change his expression, pleasant curiosity all that’s on his face. “The Service had to release a dangerous man back into the population because you couldn’t say ‘no’ to a pretty girl.” He slides

damning pictures of him and Ava across the desk.

Raylan takes his time, looking at every one. “Not my best angle,” he says, and Art covers his face with his hand.

“Be that as it may, this calls your integrity as a Marshal into question.” Vasquez leans forward, putting his damning folder back in a neat briefcase.

“I’m not looking to strip you, Deputy.” He takes a sip of the terrible office coffee, his calm expression souring for a second before he recovers. “I just need a good reason not to take disciplinary action.”

“I get results,” he says, trying for confidence.

“I’ve no doubt about that,” Vasquez replies, folding his hands on the desk, deadly serious. “Prove to me that Boyd Crowder will lead the service on to a bigger score, and I’ll make this go away.”

Art steps forward, file in hand. He spreads it deliberately in front of Vasquez, opening it to a picture of Bo Crowder.

“We’re letting the minnow out to catch the shark,” he pronounces, sitting down next to him. Vasquez turns the page, examines the case.

“Good enough.” He smiles brightly, teeth even and white. “Thanks for your time. You’ll be hearing from me.”

Vasquez closes the door quietly behind him. Art sighs deeply.

“Close shaves seem to be your stock in trade these days.”

“I could promise to change my ways,” he says, half serious.

“But you’d be lying,” says Art. “Get out of my office.”

--

“We will not be robbin’ banks,” Boyd assures him, secure in his little woodland kingdom, and Raylan smirks, can’t hold himself back.

“Could you be any more vague?” he needles, amused.

Boyd talks the talk, offering him hospitality and reassurance, letting him list his sins for his ramshackle group of itinerants, letting him ask for information that will put him away again. Boyd walks him back to the borders of his camp, an infuriating little smile around the corners

of his mouth and eyes.

“Feel free to pay a visit anytime, Raylan,” Boyd says, reaching out his hand. Raylan takes it, reluctant, feeling a piece of paper slip into his palm. He curls his fist around it, letting Boyd’s fingers slide off his.

Raylan tips his hat to Boyd, unconvinced. He’s watched him, seen his fascination for explosives first-hand, knows what he’s done with them. No, Boyd Crowder hasn’t paid his debt to society yet, and Raylan’s going to be there when he does. There’s always an endgame.

He tells himself it’s his duty, but he remembers Boyd’s face in the mine, coal streaked and gleeful with chaos. Remembers him saving his life. He looks at the phone number in his hand, written in Boyd’s meticulous lettering.

“Fire in the hole,” he murmurs to no one in particular, heading back to town.

--

The bed creaks as Winona pushes herself up from under the covers, and Raylan snaps awake at the movement. He’s not surprised she’s leaving in the middle of the night. Towards the end of their marriage he’d often found her on the pull-out couch in the living room early in the morning, eyes haunted. He must’ve had a nightmare.

“You used to want to talk about it,” he says to her back, eyes still blurry from sleep. She’s sitting on the edge of the bed, half-risen.

“Sorry I woke you,” she says, turning, hair loose and tousled around her face.

“You didn’t,” he lies. He isn’t used to sharing a bed anymore.

“You think I can’t tell when I’ve scared you?” she asks, only half-joking. She turns back towards him, bare chest pale and unmarked in the gloom.

“I was never afraid of you,” he mutters.

She sighs. “That’s not the same thing, Raylan,” Winona says at last, very deliberately. He heaves a sigh, turning onto his back, staring at the crack in the ceiling to avoid looking anywhere else.

“I just couldn’t take the silence,” she whispers, placing a hand deliberately over his heart, heat seeping into his skin. She rubs a slow circle on his chest and he shudders.

“Sometimes I’d wake you up, and you’d be so far away you didn’t even know it was me,” she continues, taking her hand away. He feels the loss like an ache.

“I’m sorry,” he says. There’s nothing else to say.

“You’ve already told me that.” She lays back down, turning his face to hers, kissing him lightly. “You can’t keep apologising to me. I want you to be happy, and I can’t give you that

if you can't give it to yourself." She kisses his forehead, traces his lips with her forefinger. He feels something pool in his gut, hot and tearing and wild. He opens his mouth to speak, but his throat closes, a phantom chain choking him.

She searches his face with her big, blue eyes, smiling sadly. "I'm not asking for anything."

As the door clicks shut behind her, he remembers their last conversation, 'you're the angriest man I've ever known' echoing in his mind.

Rage builds, directionless, and he thinks how right she was.

--

Raylan fights dirty like his daddy taught him. He kicks one of them in the balls with the vicious heel of his boot and watches him topple like a felled tree, whirling on the other with the fist his ring is on. He delights in the nasty gash he leaves across his face.

He's profoundly drunk and profoundly angry and he lets the whiskey convince him that he's invincible.

The two by four to the back of the head disabuses him of the notion, but he goes down laughing, blood on his teeth.

--

Boyd isn't the last person he expects to hear when he comes to, but he's pretty damn close.

"Thank you for calling me," he hears him say to the bartender, as if from very far away.

"Only number I found on 'im," the man grunts. "He yours?"

"He's his own," Boyd growls, voice dropping.

"Best if he never causes trouble here again."

"I cannot guarantee that he won't, but I will counsel him against it." Boyd sounds so honestly grave that it draws a laugh from his bruised chest.

"That's the pot's line, Boyd," he slurs, unblackened eye opening a crack.

"Well then." Boyd hauls him off the floor. "I guess that makes you the kettle."

They stagger to Boyd's truck, Raylan stumbling more than walking. He slumps into the passenger seat and watches Boyd buckle him in, leaning dangerously close. Raylan can smell him, an earthy, clean scent with no hint of coal. It's not what he remembers. He raises a hand and sinks it into his hair before thinking, letting his head fall back on the headrest, eye closing of its own volition. Boyd sucks in a sharp breath, arms bracketing him awkwardly. Raylan strokes down across his back as he pulls away.

“Shit,” Boyd whispers.

The truck starts with a rattle, nothing on the radio. Raylan glances over at him to see Boyd staring straight back, brows drawn down. Boyd deliberately looks back at the road, heading towards Lexington.

Raylan passes out.

If in the morning he has an impression of warm hands cleaning his wounds, he can just about claim he dreamed it.

--

Of course, it would have been far too much to hope that Arlo had changed his ways. He and Art track him to the VFW, call up Tim to get them in. He shows up half drunk and resentful, busy with his own demons.

Raylan’s never been inside, but nothing changes when he steps across the threshold. Arlo’s deep in the cups and angry with it. Raylan baits him, teasing and sharp and vicious.

Art and Gutterson jump up when Arlo slaps him, and something inside Raylan that’s been coiled up tight for years snaps into place. He remembers the feel of Arlo’s brittle arm in his hand, remembers decades of patience. He can wait a little longer.

“Arlo,” he purrs. “Use your words.”

You’re not as strong as you used to be.

Gutterson shoots him a sideways glance as they leave.

“Bet that felt good,” he mutters. Raylan’s fists itch.

--

A grin stretches across his face when Art tells him they’re prepping for a raid on the camp. He doesn’t know why he’s so eager to tear Boyd down, or even if that’s what it is. Either way, he checks his piece, puts on his vest.

The other marshals set to tossing the tents, pulling people up on parole violations, tagging runaways. Raylan throws himself down next to Boyd, with an exaggerated sprawl and an easy grin. He tips his chin up and leans back on his elbows.

“Hi, Boyd,” he says. “Ready to admit you ain’t a preacher yet? Or is it too soon to release the flock?”

“You don’t know of what you’re speaking, Raylan,” Boyd replies, grave and quiet.

Raylan laughs at him, hauls him in.

--

Art slams the bible down on Boyd's bound hands and Raylan flinches with him, his own fingers flexing in his pockets. He can't look away from him, his fever-bright eyes insisting on his innocence, even as Raylan knows Boyd can't escape chaos and destruction any more than Raylan can.

They have to let him go, but he'll be back. Raylan watches him leave as Art comes up beside him.

"Fuck if he isn't a crazy little bastard," Art mutters.

"He's not crazy," Raylan says.

"Oh?"

"Nope." He considers his words. "At least, not crazy in the traditional sense," he amends.

Art laughs low and deep, slaps him on the back.

"I'll take your word for it, boy."

--

It takes a while, but Arlo turns. Raylan's learned from his mistakes, and that kind of trust or lack of it is hard to shake. He finds him on the motel porch, drinking his bourbon, making himself right at home.

"Heard you got married. Didn't work out for ya?" Arlo mumbles.

"None of your business," Raylan replies with a tight smile.

"I remember the girls chasing you when you were a boy," he says, mean and jovial. Raylan tenses. "Ava used to chase you."

"Don't talk about Ava," he says, deliberately readying his gun out of Arlo's view

Arlo checks his watch, leans over, trying to disguise the hand he reaches towards his weapon. Raylan draws on him at last, enjoys the surprise on his face.

"You will not be betraying me tonight," he says, biting out every word.

Bo Crowder may be the instigator, but Arlo is Raylan's problem to deal with and Arlo should know better than to think that Raylan would ever turn his back to him again.

Arlo stares at him. "Son..." he begins.

His blood sings when he shoots his father, aiming to wound. Aiming for pain. There were thugs outside that are now dead on his motel room floor, life ebbing out by his feet, but the bullets he puts in the old man are by far the more satisfying kind.

He digs his fingers into the raw, red holes, listens to Arlo scream and thinks *yes, now you know*.

--

If he were more inclined to see the hand of God in things, he'd be laughing when Boyd crosses his threshold, staggering and beaten, his two enemies bloodied before him.

But as always, it's not quite that simple, and Boyd searches his face like a drowning man sighting land, tattered charisma running off him.

"I suppose it would give you a great deal of satisfaction if I told you I was lost, Raylan," Boyd says to him, direct the way he says everything, not direct at all.

His mouth is bloody, his teeth red.

"No flock to tend to?" he asks, and immediately regrets it, even as it strikes Boyd, makes him shudder slowly in pain. He tells him of the massacre in the woods.

Boyd sinks to his knees at Raylan's feet, head bowed.

Raylan reaches for him, until the phone redirects his hand. Bo Crowder tells him how it's going to go down, lying through his teeth. Boyd looks up, a little steel still in him.

"He's got Ava?" Boyd asks, and Raylan sees a spark of madness catch behind his eyes as he answers. Neither of them have been able to protect her.

They go after Bo together.

--

"So you really did find Jesus," Raylan says to the road, watching Boyd from the corner of his eye.

Boyd answers with a question. Boyd asks him, softly, if he believes in God.

"No." Raylan thinks about it, decides he likes his answer.

--

When Boyd comes out of the cabin with a gun trained on Bo, Raylan can see the murder in his eyes, watches him put a bullet in his daddy.Then he watches Boyd crumple to the ground as shots hit the dirt around them and his heart shudders in his chest. Bo Crowder's dead body lies forgotten.

“That’s the second bullet been put in you this year,” he says, pulling him inside, pressing a washcloth to the wound, handing him off to Ava, mad as hell in the corner. “I think maybe God’s trying to tell you something.”

Raylan watches as Ava laughs and presses down hard, drawing a long hiss.

“You don’t believe in God.” Boyd sends his own words back at him with a manic smile.

Raylan’s not going back to Miami, and Boyd’s not going back to the woods and Ava’s never going to run from Harlan, so they shoot the Miami gun thugs together, Boyd leaning on Ava, his blood seeping through his shirt onto hers.

He counts them as friends, even if sometimes they’re enemies.

--

Boyd’s got his name, regiment and serial number tattooed in black across the back of his shoulders. Boyd’s got a swastika on one arm and bible verse on the other and both hands in Raylan’s hair.

“Don’t think I’ve forgotten that you saved my life,” Raylan mutters into his neck, pulling himself away from Boyd’s mouth.

“Don’t think I’ve forgotten what happened to you after,” Boyd replies, tilting his chin for a better angle.

Raylan’s got a thin white line on the inside of his left arm from a microchip and a former life written in scars on his back.

Boyd falls backwards onto the bed, pulling Raylan down with him.

He sets the pace at first, rough hands gentle and frantic with pent-up need. His fingers ghost over Raylan’s hips as they shed the last of their clothes.

Raylan reaches up and curls his hand around the back of Boyd’s head, pulling him back in to the kiss. He bites lightly at Boyd’s lips, listens to his breathing quicken.

“Raylan,” Boyd says, arms braced on either side of him, eyes dark in the gloom. “I knew you'd come back.” It sounds like a confession, like something he’s never said out loud.

“What do you want?” he asks at last, bare and raw and waiting.

“I want whatever you’ll give me,” Boyd says, and that’s the last thing he expects to hear. Boyd is offering choice, the chance to say no once and for all, the chance to have their last

conversation as friends.

He reaches for him, twines their legs together. “We could have taken on our daddies together, couldn’t we?”

Boyd huffs out a laugh. “Thought the last thing you’d want is to talk.”

“Spend long enough being told to shut up, gets to be a pleasure,” he says. Boyd’s face contorts with what looks like rage and Raylan can only smile. He rolls them over, spreading himself out on top of him, setting up a lazy rhythm of gently rolling hips. Boyd gasps and clenches a fist in the sheets, bucking up to meet him.

“You’ll let me do what I want, huh?” he asks, teasing a nipple between his fingertips, feeling Boyd shudder. It’s all the answer he needs.

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He jerks awake with a warm hand on his shoulder. Boyd stares down at him, face carefully smooth. Raylan flinches away, slamming back against the headboard before he can stop himself.

“You were screaming,” says Boyd, a careful neutrality in his voice, making a show of his hands so Raylan can see them, sitting back on his heels.

“Sorry,” he manages to croak out, forcing himself to take deep breaths. “It’s an old dream.” He feels his hackles up, the last memory of being tied lingering.

“Thought it best to wake you.” Boyd sounds assured and calm, and Raylan relaxes a fraction.

“I’ll go sleep on the couch if you want the bed to yourself,” he mutters, taking deep breaths.

“You’re fine where you are,” Boyd says.

They don’t talk about it.

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Being back in Kentucky isn’t at all like Raylan’d thought it would be, except when it is.

He likes the work, always has. He likes doing the chasing instead of the running; from things more physical than his own demons, at any rate. It doesn’t stop the past from catching up occasionally.

“Been a while, Raylan,” Mags drawls, slow as molasses. “Arlo shoulda known what he was doing, sellin’ you down like that.”

She offers him a swig of her near-lethal brew.

“I’m sure he had his reasons,” he says, pushing down old rage.

“Takes some balls, you comin’ back.”

“Didn’t have much of a choice, Mags,” He says. “Now. About that molester?”

She stares at him for a moment, then belts out a laugh. “You ain’t changed much, boy.” She tells him, not at all fond.

“Surely have, Mags.”

He feels her taking the measure of him, stands his ground.

End

End Notes

Endless thanks to Norgbelulah, who held my hand all the way through.

This is my first fic, so I'd love to get some feedback!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!